

**POST-  
CONTEMPORARY  
INTERVENTIONS**

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*and*

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# **Inside The Mouse**

**work and play  
at disney  
world**

• • •

*The Project on  
Disney*

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STORY

TIME

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*From then on, men and machines can proliferate. It is even their law to do so—which the automatons never have done, being instead sublime and singular mechanisms. Men themselves only started their own proliferation when they achieved the status of machines, with the industrial revolution. Freed from all resemblance, freed even from their own double, they expand like the system of production, of which they are only the miniaturized equivalent.—Jean Baudrillard*

*Mechanical dolls were an invention of bourgeois culture. Ironically, if playing with dolls was originally the way children learned the nurturing behavior of adult social relations, it has become a training ground for learning reified ones. The goal of little girls now is to become a “doll.” This reversal epitomizes that which Marx considered characteristic of the capitalist-industrial mode of production: Machines which bring the promise of the naturalization of humanity and the humanization of nature result instead in the mechanization of both.—Susan Buck-Morss*

**I**n his masterful study of Walt Disney, Richard Schickel claims that pacing is what Disney could do well. Unable to draw—he had to be taught the Disney “signature” and even how to do a quick sketch of Mickey Mouse for autograph seekers—he was supposedly brilliant at making decisions about the plots of his films.<sup>1</sup> From “Pirates of the Caribbean” to “Splash Mountain,” it is precisely the plot or narrative sequence that is most often pointed to as the distinguishing characteristic of the rides in the Magic Kingdom. The Disney enthusiasm for storytelling gets expressed in several aspects of the resorts: as Scott Bukatman has noted, the



forced perspective architecture, the walkways, the themed costumes of the “cast members” are all an attempt to place the “guest” into narratives.<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to escape interpolation at one’s hotel, restaurant, ride, or shop since each is essentially a themed backdrop against which one is invited to act out roles scripted by many small stories. The overall experience is of a three-dimensional cinematic event that includes processions, sets, costumes, sound effects, and props.

The use of narrative at the parks has changed over time, however, and this has more than a little to do with both the death of Walt Disney and the influence of postmodernism. In what Hal Foster calls its “neoconservative” vein, postmodernism hails “a return to narrative, ornament and the figure. This position is often one of reaction, but in more ways than the stylistic—for also proclaimed is the return to history (the humanist tradition) and the return of the subject (the artist/architect as *auteur*).”<sup>3</sup> Foster distinguishes this nostalgic postmodern reaction from what he terms “poststructuralist postmodernism,” which is “profoundly anti-humanist” and, one could say, antirealist. Disney’s vision is of course more akin to a humanist postmodernism—to a dependence upon some version of history, however incomplete and bowdlerized it might be—and an antimodernist aesthetics. His active dislike of modernist abstraction was demonstrated on the occasion of his seeing a Soviet cartoon in the 1930s that consisted of purposely flattened and skewed figures. At the conclusion of the film he could not help but exclaim, “Jesus Christ, you want me to make pictures like that?”<sup>4</sup> The Disney studios in California went on to make ever-more naturalistic realism their goal and, indeed, Disney was originally the Ibsen of the cartoon, without the social commentary, in that he brought the technological refinements necessary for realism to a medium that was, until his innovations, unable to be anything but unrealistic. Once achieved, the Disney brand of realism had to be protected from further innovations. Realism was the prize; Disney could not abide any other goal: every leaf must quiver and every blade bend in a Disney movie. The same obsession is evident in Disneyland. He continued to tinker with the park until he died, but his pet project was the creation of the Audio-Animatronic automatons that he first introduced in the form of the “Enchanted Tiki Birds” at Disneyland and which the Disney Imagineers continue to make new generations of today. Not robots, simply the perfection of the human-miming puppet, these creations are the embodiment of Jean Baudrillard’s idea of hyperreality in their extension of a naive realist aesthetic:

The hyperreal represents a much more advanced phase [of realism], in the sense that even [the] contradiction between the real and the imaginary is effaced. The unreal is no longer that of dream or of fantasy. . . . To exit from the crisis of representation, you have to lock the real up in pure repetition.<sup>5</sup>

Yet as a metonymy for the goals of the park's design, the implications of this meeting of aesthetics and technology are much graver than one might think, since they represent the insidious aspects of realism as it is deployed in the park: "The only weapon of power, its only strategy [is] to reinject realness and referentiality everywhere, in order to convince us of the reality of the social . . . and the finalities of production."<sup>6</sup>

Walt Disney's investment is still jealously guarded (as are his eccentric wishes that a train always surround the Magic Kingdom because he loved model trains, that men who work at the park have 1950s-era haircuts, etc.) and embalmed in each new replication of the Magic Kingdom. "Realism"—even in its postmodern versions—continues to pay, even though the Disney "real" continues to rest on the myth that we all strive to be wealthy, WASPish, and white. Now global in its reach, the hyperreal space of the Magic Kingdom exists as an "innocent" antithesis to Le Corbusier's desire for a modernist utopia like the Ville Contemporaine, Plan Voisin, or Ville Radieuse. With the opening of EPCOT Center in 1982, however, a new paradigm was introduced: a futuristic space that unabashedly bathes itself in retro-aesthetics, hyperconservative ideology, and imperialist iconography.

*"Do you know what 'E.P.C.O.T.' stands for? 'Experimental Polyester Clothes of Tomorrow.'"*—Tram driver at the EPCOT Center

What does one do with EPCOT? As Steve Birnbaum's guide to Disney World notes, the Magic Kingdom's "Tomorrowland offers a picture of the future that is a little less than wonderful, since the architecture looks a bit too much like yesterday's version of Tomorrow."<sup>7</sup> In fact, the Anaheim Tomorrowland was unfinished at the time of the park's opening in 1955 and has been updated many times since then;<sup>8</sup> at the Orlando Tomorrowland the simulated space flight to the moon has become the "Mission to Mars." The Disney Company has had to make frequent changes to its futuristic sections and is currently planning the most extensive upgrades

so far: the Tomorrowland section at Walt Disney World will soon become "an intergalactic space port for arriving aliens," and Future World, one of the two main sections of EPCOT, is also slated for improvement.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that at the recently opened EuroDisney, Tomorrowland has been renamed Discoveryland since the future, as a theme, has caused Disney more problems than any other. As an indirect critique of the present, the future easily catches up with Disney: it is a much more difficult place to hide one's agenda than the past. If the Disney future is in need of frequent revising, then might there be a problem with its thinking about the present? Why, one must wonder, would Disney decide to create EPCOT, a billion-dollar version of their weakest resort creation in the first place? And now that it exists, how can it ever be anything but an obsolescent view of the future? Of course, it exists in part because Walt Disney willed it—almost literally. Before his death (or freezing, whichever occurred) he envisioned the 28,000-acre Florida property as containing not only the Magic Kingdom but also an entire city encased in a dome and consisting of homes and a city center with showcases for leading-edge capitalist-developed technology and products from around the world: an Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. What resulted over twenty years after his death was another resort park whose characteristics resemble a conventionalized rendering of only the city center part of his plan. Instead of a capitalist beacon of hope and opportunity, it is an urban simulacrum whose goals seem to be not to thrill or entertain, but to sell things and distract as many (or bore as few) people as possible in a given day. Disney's dream of a city may yet be realized to some extent in the Celebration project—a town where houses will be wholly owned by Disney. But the futuristic present that he imagined has been transformed into a digital theme park of hands-on computer games (Communicore), corporate narratives of impossible futures (Future World), and second-order simulacra of the parts of the global village most visited by the United States tourist (World Showcase).

Unlike the rest of Walt Disney World, EPCOT is not only a spectacle in Guy Debord's sense of the term but also a model, as Baudrillard defines the word: a self-contained processor of circular information.<sup>10</sup> In an attempt, perhaps, to be more participatory and educational, the park is filled with interactive computer games and information stations. Most of these, however, simply replay the same limited information from the

same limited number of choices and combinations. The experience of these devices is similar to the experience of many of the rides. In “Horizons,” for instance, one may choose to view several possible futures—living underwater, in the desert, etc.—yet the choices are controlled and the resulting information so basic as to seem ludicrous. The information about the future that is generated at Future World involves, like public opinion polls, the manipulation of “*that which cannot be decided*.”<sup>11</sup> As Baudrillard explains:

Do [polls] give an exact picture of reality, or simple tendencies, or the refraction of this reality in a hyperspace of simulation whose curve even is unknown? True, false, undecidable. Their most sophisticated analyses leave room always for the reversibility of the hypotheses. . . . The internal logic of these procedures (statistics, probability, operational cybernetics) is certainly rigorous and “scientific”; somehow though it does not stick, it is a fabulous fiction whose index of refraction in any reality (true or false) is nil. This is even what gives these models their forcefulness. But also it is this which only leaves them, as truth, the paranoid projection tests of a case, or of a group which dreams of a miraculous correspondence of the real to their models, and therefore of an absolute manipulation.<sup>12</sup>

What is supposedly offered in the narratives created by Exxon, AT&T, Kraft, and other multinationals is either objective projections of our future based upon statistical fact or, as in many of the computer games one can play, the opinions of either the majority or the expert. What is actually occurring, however, is the transference of one or another type of impossible ideal back to the visitor—an ideal that one may never have had but in which one is invited to believe. As with opinion polls, this process short-circuits any possibility for imaginative thinking, since one becomes involved in the process of believing in the choices while at the same time unknowingly giving the poll-taker or the field scientist exactly what they want.<sup>13</sup> Because the choices are prepackaged, yet presented as “personal” preferences, participants are alienated from themselves in the very act of asserting themselves. EPCOT epitomizes this process by giving visitors the illusion that they can choose their desires for themselves from an unlimited supply.<sup>14</sup>

One effect of this alienation is the death of the singular, the original. As Baudrillard notes, the World Trade Center is radically distinct from the

Empire State Building because the former consists of two identical buildings.<sup>15</sup> At EPCOT, this same effect is symbolized in the repetition of the two Communicore buildings that lie at the heart of the park. In fact, their design is mirrored in the circularity of the geodesic sphere and park layout, as well as in the ubiquitous styling of the buildings. Future World parallels the distinguishing features of pop art in which repetition and serialism evoke a simulation as distinct from the idea of the counterfeit copy as Warhol is from a Renaissance painter. The mechanical and technological reproduction of opinions, of futures, and of the experience of the city runs rampant at EPCOT where, with time, one can repeat the same ride, the same film, the same visit endlessly in an orgy of plasticity. What one can never do is suppress the boundaries of capitalism as it invades every area of one’s consciousness and represents itself as a desire about to be fulfilled. The boundaries of the Magic Kingdom—Frontierland, Adventureland, Fantasyland—are here made into one neat binary: a nationless space (the future) where companies replace countries, or a memory of or desire for travel to a country whose image is already so encrusted with fictionalization as to be no more real than a film or legend. Borders are replaced with a temporal stage between the eventual capitalist takeover of the world and the pseudoreality of current late capitalism.

If EPCOT’s design foregrounds time, the Magic Kingdom’s can be said to focus on the experience of space. As Louis Marin suggests, in the arrangement of lands into a starlike pattern, the Magic Kingdom suggests a map.<sup>16</sup> The historically specific type of map, I\* would argue, is not a modern map of “geographical form” brought to “birth of modern scientific discourse” but resembles instead the medieval maps described by Michel de Certeau that “[mark] out . . . itineraries (performative indications . . .), along with the stops one was to make.”<sup>17</sup> One begins at the entrance to the Magic Kingdom and then, by visiting each land, one enjoys a set of preordained emotions much as one might in a staged pilgrimage of religious ecstasy, only here one is not crossing a real terrain but an artificial one through one’s own childhood (Fantasyland) or national memory (Liberty Square). However, as de Certeau theorizes, a frontier “does not have the character of a nowhere that cartographical representation ultimately presupposes. It has a mediating role. So does the story that gives

\*Shelton Waldrep

it voice.”<sup>18</sup> The frontiers of the Magic Kingdom—the various lands and their borders—are about communication between zones, contacts, encounters, and struggles that require stories in order to be passed on. The *frisson* offered the visitor is the excitement without any of the (real) hardship. The experiences are of the body—the threat of danger, pain, getting lost, the thrill of making it through. The use of theatrical procession—of architecture as time or narrative—is central.

The monorail is the resort’s primary symbol, the embodiment of movement through space and time that culminates with the arrival at the lobby of the Contemporary Hotel’s Grand Canyon Concourse. As de Certeau notes, “[i]n modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a ‘metaphor’—a bus or a train. Stories . . . every day . . . traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.”<sup>19</sup> In the Magic Kingdom, narrative is used metaphorically to transport the visitor out of one world and into another. Rather than fixing space, the boundaries between lands actually create the possibility of its movement, its ambiguity via narrative.<sup>20</sup> Realistic detail is needed to protect the illusion begun by the story itself. In the “Jungle Cruise,” the automatic elephants that spray water on the guests must look real in order not to disrupt the metaphorical ride of the story literalized in the movement of the boat. And passing through various “barriers”—from South America to Africa, for example—is brought about by the (racist, sexist, and colonialist) banter of the pilot: border crossings verbally “literalized” and staged by an actor whose script even demands that he pretends to get lost.

The many opportunities to participate (however passively) in these stories at the Magic Kingdom—to *enter* “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,” “The Haunted Mansion,” etc.—provide the park’s primary enjoyment. Visitors cross over into realized fantasy. At EPCOT, on the other hand, the narratives or stories fail to present any border other than the one between the “now” and the “will be.” The only story is that of capitalist expansion masquerading as science fiction in which the heroes of the next century are not people but machines, with faith placed not in courage but in technology. Lacking the stories that Disney took from his films and used as narratives for the rides at the Magic Kingdom, EPCOT represents the failure of space to articulate narrative. There, stories substitute playing to the market for the tensions that empower fantasies. As de Certeau re-

marks, “[I]n order to discern in [spaces] the modes in which . . . distinct operations are combined, we need criteria and analytical categories—a necessity that leads us back to travel stories of the most elementary kind.”<sup>21</sup> At EPCOT a sense of place is lost and, with it, the possibility of stories. In fact, the only narrative that remains intact is the official myth extolling the wonders of what can be accomplished without the state. The creation of a stateless utopia—no land—ultimately removes any possibility of communication between and among groups. Just as the architecture of the various “countries” of World Showcase are kept apart rather than connecting as the “lands” of the Magic Kingdom do, EPCOT represents the monadic separation and alienation of people from each other and from themselves.

*Why should we be obliged to prefer a nostalgia for the future to that for the past? Could not the model city which we carry in our minds allow for our known psychological constitution? Could not this ideal city, at one and the same time, behave, quite explicitly, as both a theatre of prophecy and a theatre of memory?—Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter*

*Critical culture depends on political culture, and our political culture is reactive in its anxiety about the present.—Hal Foster*

In an essay on Walter Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk*, Susan Buck-Morss notes that for Benjamin “utopian desire was based on memory, not anticipation.”<sup>22</sup> She proceeds to quote Benjamin quoting Kafka’s description of the singing mouse Josephine in one of his stories: “Something of our poor brief childhood is in it, something of lost happiness which can never be found again, but also something of active present-day life, of its small gaieties, unaccountable and yet real and unquenchable.”<sup>23</sup> The re-creation of desire for the memories of one’s childhood is central to Benjamin’s examination of the Paris arcades which were, at the time he was writing, mainly a distant memory of a crumbling edifice from the age of Napoleon III, the bourgeois king who brought Paris its boulevards and sewers. Buck-Morss sees Benjamin’s great project as an attempt to find nothing less than the origins of modernity in the transformation of mass culture that took place after the arcades were closed. The story his text would tell, therefore, would not be a canonical one: “Told with ‘cunning,’ the *Passagen-Werk* would accomplish a double task: it would dispel the mythic power of present being . . . by showing it to be composed of

decaying objects with a history. . . . And it would dispel the myth of history as progress (or the modern as new) by showing history and modernity in the child's light as archaic." Benjamin likened the structure that would contain this twofold purpose to a fairy tale. His consistent objective, however, was to present the material—as opposed to the mythological—explanation for the arcades and the objects in them.<sup>24</sup>

The arcades caused Benjamin to "once again live the life of our parents and grandparents." His fascination with the old-fashioned items that were preserved for sale there is perhaps not unlike the feeling one has at EPCOT upon finding brochures that suggest teaching schoolchildren about the marvels of nuclear energy. Although lacking the decadent appearance of Benjamin's arcades, EPCOT is also caught in a hopeless dialectic of decay in which one can only relive ideologies now so fragile as to crumble upon the slightest brush with thought. The theological status that consumerism occupies at EPCOT parallels in an ironic way the enlightenment that Benjamin hoped would occur as people became aware of the true nature of the shift in consciousness that had taken place. By becoming a storyteller much like Disney, he hoped to bring material history back to the analysis of culture, but in order to aid in a very different kind of revolution.<sup>25</sup>

If the arcades function as an ancestor for EPCOT in terms of the technological development of mass culture, it is in the examination of childhood memory that they act as a precursor to the Magic Kingdom. In terms of scale alone the construction of the various sections of the park functions differently in order to provoke various psychological reactions. Although most of the fiberglass facades use forced perspective—the buildings are nine-tenths normal size on the first floor and eight-tenths after the first floor—Frontierland looks "grown-up," so that one can more easily enter into the scene as a participant, which is impossible to do at Fantasyland where the adult, at least, experiences the rides from a wistful—therefore more distant—mental state.<sup>26</sup> The section most recently added to the park, Mickey's Starland, makes this subtle use of scale obvious: the entire area is proportioned for young children (mouse-size) so that they can play in a section built not to accommodate their parents' memories and imaginations but their own feelings of uniqueness—the equivalent of what adults feel in the rest of the park. To say that the reason for this is at least in part so that they may better ape and strive for the condition of adults is finally to miss the point. As Buck-Morss notes, "From the child's position, all history, from the most ancient to the most

recent past, occurs in mythic time. No history recounts his or her lived experience. All of the past lies in an archaic realm of 'Ur'-history."<sup>27</sup> The rest of the park may be an attempt to recreate this childhood state in the older consumer<sup>28</sup> as the planners tap into a "collective unconscious with innate archetypes" or what Benjamin referred to as the "world of symbols." The "child's reception of objects" accomplishes what adults cannot, which is to "discover the new anew." The Magic Kingdom is an attempt to recreate in adults at least the memory of this discovery and to fuel the original process in any child who visits the park and drives a miniature racing car or bops through Fantasyland.<sup>29</sup> In EPCOT, however, the function of objects in relation to the mythos of childhood is quite different; indeed, EPCOT acts as the anodyne to the Magic Kingdom, becoming the place where "the bourgeois ideology of historical progress does its best to overwhelm this childhood intuition of even the most recent history as archaic and mythically distant, by substituting for it the image of history's triumphal march, which submerges the new generations in its 'irresistible' tide."<sup>30</sup>

The displacement of children that occurs in the movement from the Magic Kingdom to EPCOT is part of a general trajectory away from childhood that seems to be taking place in the Disney constructions completed since the opening of the original Disneyland. Richard Francaviglia, in his comparison of the Main Street, U.S.A. sections of the Anaheim and Orlando parks, accurately delineates the change from the first streetscape with its "softened and romanticized . . . image of the small town" to the "ornate, almost burlesque quality [that] pervades the design" of its counterpart in Florida.<sup>31</sup> Especially in World Showcase, EPCOT seems designed for nostalgic adults and the desires that are peculiar to them. In this sense the German beer hall, posters for Parisian follies, and pseudoscientific rides bring to mind Fredric Jameson's idea of the historicist, as opposed to the historical, in that they form "an allusion to a present out of real history which might just as well be a past removed from real history."<sup>32</sup>

The Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park, the newest addition to Disney World, is even less childlike in that here the point to almost every "attraction" is to celebrate the loss of innocence by seeing firsthand how movies are made. Most of the MGM park is devoted to showing visitors how something is done: stunts, animation, set design, and special effects; the mood is one of mellow realization that it is all sleight-of-hand. This mood is achieved in large part by the park's carefully planned deco architecture,

which evokes a nostalgia for a Hollywood of the 1930s, and the restaurants, which embody the wry sense of humor of television couch potatoes of the baby boomer generation. With an emphasis on eating, shopping, and nostalgia, the park's ethos is even more distinctly aimed at adults than EPCOT's.<sup>33</sup>

Although the manipulation of memory is paramount to the functioning of all three parks that make up Orlando's Disney World, in many ways the MGM theme park contradicts the paradigm established by the Magic Kingdom. If the first park existed—like the TV show of the same name—to sell Disney products, one cannot help but be struck by the various trademarks and copyright symbols on the pages of the official brochure describing the rides at MGM: "Star Wars," "Indiana Jones," "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," "Jim Henson's Muppets," not to mention as yet unincorporated real-life stars such as Chevy Chase and Robin Williams. Here Disney has as many tie-ins with other peoples' products as with its own. Like the Magic Kingdom, the MGM park advertises Disney products—from the latest shows on the Disney Channel to the newest Disney animated or live-action film—and does so in a much more naked manner than in the original Anaheim park. But the MGM park also champions rivals, and does so by copying another competitor's paradigm, Universal Studios, for the very form of the park itself.<sup>34</sup> By and large the park celebrates the cultural product created and nurtured by someone else under the putative theme of celebrating the history of movies in general.

Of course, Disney is not unique in copying itself—there is an entire chain of Six Flags parks—or even in copying other parks as the differences between theme parks, hotel complexes, malls, etc., are eroding rapidly. But in the pairing of MGM with the Magic Kingdom at the same resort, Disney seems to be in competition with its own history, its own stories about itself. The MGM park does not strive for a total approach to aesthetics the way the Magic Kingdom does: Disney conceived of Audio-Animatronics as the combination of all of the arts, and the cinematic feeling of the Magic Kingdom recreates the feel of his films.<sup>35</sup> MGM, in contrast, does not place its emphasis on rides. Instead, there is a tendency in the attractions to replace automation with live action. This trend takes various forms, such as inviting different celebrities to the park each day, presenting shows and demonstrations (some with audience participation), and having cast members act out parts (such as autograph seekers who come up to guests). Narrative, the mainstay of the Magic Kingdom, is replaced with skits and characters that are free-floating, or, more spe-

cifically, function only as advertisements for current products or as stereotypes in a Hollywood "that never was." The overall effect is to undermine the strategy of the Magic Kingdom—to cheapen the illusion it creates.

The one ride at MGM that does resemble those at the Magic Kingdom is entitled, self-consciously, "The Great Movie Ride." Containing some of the least interesting yet most technologically advanced Audio-Animatronic figures, it has no story to tell; it is similar to the rides in Future World, which, in lieu of stories taken from films, present either a pastiche of "educational" information and corporate self-congratulation, or muddled metanarratives, like "the ascent of man." For all of their datedness, the earlier "dark rides," as they were called when in development, present passengers with a seamless effect that taps into various psychological tropes.<sup>36</sup> At MGM Studios, however, the feeling is one of entering a world of commercial allusion that references only that which is available on cable TV and within the recent memory—or at least exposure—of the Reagan generation.

Much of the MGM park is boring. The backstage tour contains such stupefying attractions as "The Studio Showcase—Here before your eyes are the actual costumes, props and set pieces worn, handled and utilized by today's biggest stars." Any real imagination has gone somewhere else, mainly into the creation of an intriguing version of Hollywood Boulevard circa the 1930s and 1940s and restaurants that make dining a pointedly postmodern experience. The architecture is not so much Disney's own special brand of pastiche canonized by Venturi as it is a classically postmodern variety consisting of references to actual historical examples, such as "'California Crazy' architecture," or to TV culture as in the Sci-Fi Drive-In Dinner where, according to one guidebook, you can "[s]it in booths designed like vintage '50s convertibles and watch scenes from campy science fiction films while dining on burgers and sandwiches." With the MGM park Disney has created its own comment on postmodern culture, including the manipulation of tone ("campy") and distance ("designed like"). The odd combination of the straight-faced and the surreal that dominates the Magic Kingdom and EPCOT is here effaced. A park for the video generation, it contains the Michel Eisner ethos of new product hustle: money is what dreams are made of.

For myself, and for others of my generation, the effects of television on the Magic Kingdom could be discerned mainly in the way that theme

parks and tv used the same strategies to sell themselves via the selling of other products. With the advent of the MGM park, tv and video seem to dominate and largely replace the stories that rides are based upon—or the references that tourists collectively understand. Movies, Disney almost seems to be saying, have lost the battle with tv. In a videotape produced by the Walt Disney Company and used to promote the park under the ostensible function of “planning” one’s vacation to Disney World, the introductory segment to the MGM park says that “all the major television networks play a popular leading role at the Disney Studios.” Although the use of tv was an early and successful strategy of Walt’s that has always been a part of the Disney parks, it is ironic that tv has a special formal relationship with the MGM park. It is truly an acknowledgment of a shift in consciousness to see tv as the cultural glue uniting the visitors rather than the innate stories of adventure and romance, that one sees rehearsed—however insensitively—at the Magic Kingdom. An extreme example of tv as common cultural referent occurred to me at Universal Studios, Florida, when I first walked through “Hollywood” and heard the theme to *LA Law* playing everywhere as the aural marker for this portion of the park. Hollywood—a nostalgic place physically residing in Los Angeles—was represented by a television show about modern-day Los Angeles. An area of an amusement park that referenced a fictive discourse about film and power was given its subliminal identity via a reference to a tv show from the present. Across the “street,” actors dressed as Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz walked toward me. At MGM the celebrities often invited to the park are usually stars of tv, not film. Here, however, were actors portraying tv stars. The effect I experienced contained so many levels of cultural reference refracted through each other that the result seemed hardly describable by the concept of postmodernism. Increasingly, in discussions of “high” as opposed to “low” cultural production, scholars are already talking of effects that are somehow beyond postmodernism—or that seem a further intensification of it. If a cultural change has occurred, I would argue that it first happened in Orlando when MGM Studios opened and was soon followed by Universal.

What MGM and Universal tell us about changes in theme parks specifically—especially Disney’s—is somewhat difficult to pin down. The designers of Universal are in some ways luckier than those in charge of MGM in that they are free to cram into one space all of the ideas they can



copy from Disney World whereas MGM must—at least to some extent—avoid competing with its other parks in order to maintain the illusion that each is separate and unique. Universal has compounded this advantage by opting not to mimic the Disney image in everything. Although Universal seems to uphold the Disney standards of cleanliness and crowd control, it does have rides that are bigger on thrills and attractions and shows that are more daring in their use of sexual innuendo and in acknowledging difference within and among people. Disney, in rushing to open MGM before Universal, seems to have built a park before they really had a clear idea of what they either wanted to put in it or even what type of image they wanted for it.

Perhaps befitting Disney's film tradition, MGM trades mainly on atmosphere rather than thrills. By contrast, Universal pushes the adventure movies that made money in the 1970s and 1980s: *Jaws*, *Back to the Future*, the remake of *King Kong*, *E.T.*, and, surely to come in the 1990s, *Jurassic Park*. Universal Studios is more likely to reference a broader range of movies and other types of media—one sees clips of the Beatles while waiting in one line, for instance—than does MGM, which focuses instead on a putative tradition of great moviemaking. MGM seems to have doomed itself into a defensive posture by attempting, as Fjellman says, to become the “spoiler” by opening before Universal; if the park has a strategy, it has taken on the job of educator—much like EPCOT—and left the thrills mostly to Universal. When MGM opened, it was by far the smallest of the three main Disney World parks; however, it has added “Star Tours”—MGM's version of Universal's “Back to the Future” ride—and is about to open the “Twilight Zone Tower of Terror.” Both rides are heavy on thrills. MGM is also adding another section—Sunset Strip—to its cramped space. An equally important sign of change is the fact that one can now find fresh fruit stands in the park, although these concessions to changing times coexist with shops that sell toy guns to children in a jungle-themed area near the “Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular.” While some things change at Disney, much else never does.

MGM has to its advantage over both Universal and the other Disney parks the fact that it is do-able in less than a day. Similarly, there is a relaxed atmosphere to this park that makes it feel less overwhelming than either the other Disney parks or even Universal. Whereas Universal's park is organized into a large gridlike pattern, at MGM the curved, compact streets and alleys are fractured and laid out in an irregular pattern so

that one has a greater sense that one is exploring. MGM's designers have used its relatively small size to create an urban design that emphasizes twists and turns, unexpected juxtapositions, nooks, and vistas much like the better pedestrian effects in the Magic Kingdom. The shopping areas of MGM are similar to Main Street, U.S.A. in their blend of merchandising and nostalgia. By focusing on TV, however, one is made aware that this is a postmodern version of the golden age of Hollywood: from the black and white TVs in the 50's Prime Time Cafe to the monitors that broadcast prerecorded instructions while you wait in the numerous lines.<sup>37</sup>

In a sense, MGM's thesis seems not to be that one can go home again—as it is in the Magic Kingdom—but that the past has been replaced by the media through which we now generally access it. Hollywood is only available via the visual media, especially television. Like an apotheosis of Marshall McLuhan's tenets, MGM asks that one acknowledge the difference between Walt's vision of the past and a newer version historically available only to people the age of his children and younger. From MGM to the ubiquitous Disney Stores now in every mall, Disney seems to be placing an emphasis on marketing the villain, which has come back into prominence in the last three Disney animated hit movies. By banking on this type of character, Disney seems to be betting on an adult interest in camp or queer sensibilities—that is, on a generation that doesn't take their products straight.

With a section of the park devoted to presenting Europeans with American regional styles in the form of hotels—Hotel New York, Hotel Santa Fe, etc.—designed by leading postmodern architects, EuroDisney completes the process of postmodern comment begun at MGM. EuroDisney reflects an image from across the Atlantic of our own cultural process by leaving nothing sacred, nothing unabsorbed. The technique of representing European capitals as shops and restaurants in EPCOT is here neatly reprocessed and combined with the postmodern style of the 1990s. Undoubtedly, American tourists in Paris will flock to see EuroDisney in order not only to have done another Disney resort, but to comfort themselves with the idea that they can now place the Louvre in perspective.

Whatever the future holds for the Disney parks, it is certain that they will have company. An explosion in Disney-inflected entertainment complexes is on the horizon, with everything from an Elvis park in Tokyo to a quasi-Buddhist playground for attaining enlightenment in Niagara, Canada. Resembling Jim Jarmusch movies more than county fairs, these

extravaganzas parallel the more recent changes in Disney resort history. The original antimodernist aesthetic and technological vision Disney had for the Magic Kingdom, which metamorphoses into a postmodern version of a modernist nightmare at EPCOT, has finally resulted in the properly postmodern cash cow that is the MGM theme park. As the themed environment becomes more and more commonplace, Disney will struggle to redo its formula and reinvent its continuing commentary upon both its own origins and its current distance from them.

This historical metanarrative that Disney authors for itself seems poised at a point of contradictory impulses: modern and postmodern, narrative and spatial, xenophobic and open-minded. The response to the contradictions might be a new commission-based approach whereby the Disney company comes more and more to resemble a franchiser with a line of products (that includes resort parks) and less a collection of artists, as Walt Disney imagined it. Indeed the "Disney Decade," as Eisner has proclaimed the 1990s, may become a decade of crisis as the enterprise attempts to adapt and profit from the uncertainties of a cultural and economic situation that Disney could not have predicted. We are already witnessing the increasing displacement of the "interrelated and sequential" themes that provide park visitors with a detailed, relatively unified sense of place and "story." The "themes" planned for new parks ("animals," "ocean") promise to abandon narrative and enter an era of high-concept production: the simpler the idea, the greater the draw. All that is needed are special effects and big stars.<sup>38</sup>

What one may ultimately be left with are neither stories nor parks but simply products replayed and remarketed at different times and in different forms in an endless loop for every new generation. The planners, meanwhile, attempt to give their resort one of everything: one wave pool, one campground, one punk disco, one haunted house, one tropical hotel. To occupy the space between the EPCOT hotels and World Showcase, Disney is now planning its own version of the boardwalk in Atlantic City. It will, naturally, be filled with shops. The choices that one has at Disney, from restaurants to rides to hotels, gives one the illusion that they are all different. Every guest knows, however, that the secret is in the fact that they are all the same. As with flavors of chain store ice cream or Swatch watches or silkscreens by Warhol, the aspect of capitalism that is being underlined is the link between disposability and consumption, product and desire. The point is to eventually do all of them anyway because they

are all equally good. Just as capitalism must continually expand its borders and take over new spaces, new stories, Disney must continue to add to itself forever in an endless attempt to provide more of the same, to provide what theme parks are for: a planned opportunity to avoid thinking about the present.